United Nations A/63/PV.1

General Assembly

Sixty-third session

Official Records

1st plenary meeting
Tuesday, 16 September 2008
New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the President of the General Assembly

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I declare open the sixty-third session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 62 of the rules of procedure, I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Statement by the President

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Fortunately, communication goes beyond the spoken word and its limitations, especially in this twenty-first century, which has been called the age of the image. I would therefore like to begin my statement with a brief multimedia introduction, using the tools that technology has given us, and I invite members to watch a short video.

A video was displayed in the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): And now let us return to communicating in the more traditional form of words.

I come before the Assembly today fully aware of the complexity of the responsibility I assumed in accepting the presidency of this sixty-third session of the General Assembly, which you, the members, have so generously entrusted to me. Despite the relative insignificance to which the General Assembly has been relegated in recent years, I firmly believe that the task of presiding over this General Assembly is an important one.

It becomes even more significant when this post strives to transform the prevailing exclusionary logic of selfishness that has, at times, crippled the ability of this body to fulfil its mandate as enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Left unchecked, this logic can only lead us to death and the extinction of our own species. The logic of selfishness must be replaced with the logic of love, of inclusiveness, of "we" and "our", of solidarity. The struggle for the full acceptance of the logic of solidarity in both our Organization and in its Member States will be the principal endeavour of this presidency.

The state of our world today is deplorable, inexcusable and therefore shameful. What Tolstoy denounced as "mad selfishness" explains why, as trillions of dollars are spent on wars of aggression, more than half the world's people languish in hunger

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and destitution. Our priorities, my dear brothers and sisters, could hardly be more confused.

All of us, without exception, share responsibility for the state of the world today. While some are undoubtedly more responsible than others, there is no point in arguing over our different degrees of responsibility. What is important at this point is that we look to the future, learning from our past mistakes, and together embark wholeheartedly on the task of building a new and better world, a resolute world, in the conviction that another world is possible.

The situation in which our world finds itself is even more serious today than it was 63 years ago when the United Nations was founded. Nevertheless, we are not fatally condemned to continue sinking into the morass of mad, suicidal selfishness in which we find ourselves.

In order to escape from that morass, we have only to recognize that we are all sisters and brothers and that the truth of that fact demands that we change our way of thinking, behaving and interacting with one another. At this point in the odyssey of human existence, that is the central truth. Our acceptance of that truth and of its logical consequences will determine whether coming generations will have a decent future.

Love prompts us to take action in the construction of a more just and non-violent world, with solidarity as its most important feature. We must do so without looking back and while seeking reconciliation with all those who might have caused us pain and suffering. If we cannot forgive, we will not be deserving of life. We will have opted for hate and rancour, which lead only to destruction and death.

In addition to the capacity to forgive, we must all once again think of ourselves as stewards of planet Earth. Little by little, we humans, especially those of us in the West, have rebelled against our vocation of stewardship, our reason for being. We have increasingly become arrogant landlords, believing that we have absolute rights over what has been entrusted to our care and management for the good of all.

That is the suicidal madness in which we find ourselves. Wake-up calls, whatever their form and no matter how brotherly their spirit, always make some people uncomfortable. However, in view of the dangerous excesses of human behaviour, these wake-up calls are imperative. The basic problem is one ethics. Simply stated, we are not treating each othe the natural world as we should.

My call for us to embrace the supreme law love, without exceptions or exclusions, for the sak present and future generations, is made on understanding that what gives meaning to hu existence is the never-ending process of more and m dedication to the service of our fellow beings an universal solidarity. In that process of transforma all religions and ethical-philosophical systems can should help us.

Although for me personally the paradigm life-giving and redemptive behaviour is in the Cro am convinced that all of us, in our respective religi cultural and ethical-philosophical traditions, fin strong summons to embrace the logic of love solidarity. We must all jointly endeavour to turn summons into the main propelling force for human and for the United Nations. Love for each other and our Earth should ground our interdependence and g our collective activity.

At this very difficult time for humankind, Organization has a major role to play and an obliga to prepare itself to perform better. The central overarching objective of the sixty-third session of General Assembly will be to democratize the Un Nations. In so doing, we will ensure that the Un Nations maintains its place as the world's m important and indispensable organization for achie the levels of peace and security that our peoples rightly demanding of us.

I am aware of the great expectations that the majority of the dispossessed inhabitants of threatened planet have placed in the United Nation bring them peace and security and to defend their r to life and full development. We must not fail them was most of all for the dispossessed of the world th took up the challenge of presiding over the sixty-t session of the General Assembly. It is to them — to our dispossessed sisters and brothers on Earth — th dedicate my presidency. We must unite our effo with all the seriousness that the task requires, to m their expectations. I trust that I can count on generous cooperation of all members. On behal Nicaragua and the entire Latin American Caribbean region, my extended homeland, I th members for their confidence.

I should now like to turn to the issues of hunger, poverty and high oil and food prices. Various large-scale crises — economic, financial, environmental, humanitarian and legal — are converging in the present world crisis in food prices. These crises are reflected in the current turbulence and distortion in credit markets, subsidized oil prices, the rise in world food prices and rising prices in general, and are aggravated even further by economic stagnation.

Each one of those crises interacts with the others, exponentially aggravating the deterioration in the world economy. As much as authorities and the media strive to minimize the gravity of the current situation, the truth is that we find ourselves before a global economic upheaval of unprecedented magnitude. As a result, today we are in serious danger of suffering setbacks in the fight against hunger and poverty, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce extreme poverty.

At the root of the problem of world hunger is the unequal distribution of purchasing power within and between countries. Rather than concentrating on increasing food production as the sole solution, the central focus of our efforts should be on reducing the inequalities in the world's food production system.

If we are to deal effectively with the problem of hunger, Governments will need to take the courageous decisions that the crisis requires of them, including reorienting their own national priorities, transcending local and national confines to take into account the greater good and the well-being of the world's poor.

We must demonstrate our readiness to tackle even the most sensitive and contentious of issues. That means addressing, for example, the market distortions caused by the agricultural subsidies of developed countries; the impact of speculation on futures markets; the impacts of climate change on food production and the environment; the multiple impacts of the production of biofuels; and last but not least, the problematic development model imposed on developing countries by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

If we are to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger from this Earth, the General Assembly, in addition to determining the real needs in terms of the types and amounts of international cooperation required, will have to meet the challenge of fostering strong feelings of solidarity in order to awaken the necessary political will among all our Member States.

During the sixty-third session, we will therefore examine the immediate and root causes of the world food crisis and its impact on world hunger and poverty. And for that reason, I welcome the declaration of the ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement held in Tehran in late July 2008, calling for a meeting at the highest level to deal with the theme of food security and to identify immediate and medium-term actions to resolve that crisis.

It is also imperative that we deal with the root causes that limit the institutional capacity of our own General Assembly, such as, first, non-observance of the principles and standards laid down in the Charter; secondly, the growing tendency to deprive the General Assembly of any real power; thirdly, the reduction of the Economic and Social Council to a peripheral body; and fourthly, the transfer of ever more power to the Security Council and the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as to other international finance and trade institutions in general.

In other words, it is precisely in the lack of democracy within our Organization where we find the most profound cause for the most serious problems in our world today.

On the democratization of the United Nations, without a doubt, a United Nations enriched by genuine input from all its Members would make our Organization the ideal forum for dealing effectively with the world's most pressing problems and for preventing a few from imposing upon the majority courses of action that only make matters worse. For that reason, we have concluded that it has become imperative to hold a high-level dialogue on the democratization of the United Nations. At the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, we will hold this dialogue in three five-day sessions.

The first session will concern the indispensable coordination of the Bretton Woods and other international financial and commercial institutions with the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

The Bretton Woods institutions were established for the very purpose of addressing the inequity of extreme poverty and helping to rebuild the world economy. But all too often they have been used to

impose ill-advised prescriptions that have only made the problem of poverty worse instead of helping to resolve it. While they are not United Nations bodies in the strictest sense, the Bretton Woods institutions are among the specialized agencies referred to in Articles 57 and 63 of the Charter, which are to be brought into relationship with the Organization on terms defined by agreement with the Economic and Social Council.

Both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are basically controlled by the United States and Europe. Both institutions have been and continue to be used as instruments of domination. The world resents this, and this situation must change. The necessary democratization of those international financial institutions requires a change in the system of shares and the system for electing the respective boards of directors.

The second session of this high-level dialogue of the General Assembly will be devoted to a discussion of the revitalization and empowerment of the Assembly itself through the transfer to this body of the power wrongly accumulated in the Security Council, the Bretton Woods institutions and even, believe it or not, in the bureaucracy of our Organization.

At the United Nations, the word "democracy" is becoming increasingly empty, with no real meaning or substance. Even with a majority as overwhelming as 184 votes to 4 against the 45-year-old United States embargo against Cuba — and we see such votes year after year — that patently unjust and universally repudiated embargo remains firmly in place. If the opinion of more than 95 per cent of the membership of the United Nations can be so casually ignored, of what use is this General Assembly? That is a question that deserves some thought. How can we be content to say that we have democracy simply because we have the "one nation, one vote" rule? What good are votes if they are ignored?

In any event, it is clear that we all must wholeheartedly embrace the universal call for a strengthened and empowered General Assembly, which can only be achieved through the democratization of the United Nations. We know that fighting the powers that be has never been easy, but we also know that the future of the United Nations will depend on our success in the struggle for its democratization — that is, on our capacity to persuade some of the powerful to free themselves of their unbridled ambition for more and more power, at the expense of the rights of the majority.

We will continue to stress that the democratization that the United Nations so urgently needs will entail decentralizing the power accumulated in a small group of States and in the Organization's own bureaucracy and transferring that power to the General Assembly, where it logically belongs. That is an urgent task: the world cannot afford to wait another 15 years listening to speeches that lead nowhere. It is time, brothers and sisters, to act.

It is all well and good to preach democracy, but it would be better still for us to put it into practice, right here at the United Nations. It makes no sense to wage wars of aggression that kill hundreds of thousands of people with the purported aim of supporting democracy, while at the same time using every imaginable means and pretext to prevent the democratization of the United Nations itself.

In addition, the General Assembly should become more proactive, and its resolutions should be binding. The idea that the clear and unequivocal voice of "We the peoples" should be regarded as a mere recommendation with no binding power should be buried forever in our anti-democratic past.

The third and final session of the high-level dialogue on the democratization of the United Nations will be devoted to a frank discussion of the Security Council.

Many areas of the United Nations system are in urgent need of attention, and chief among them is the Security Council. It is a sad but undeniable fact that serious breaches of and threats to international peace and security are being perpetrated by some members of the Security Council that are unable to break what appears to be their addiction to war.

In the case of some of those members, the veto privilege seems to have gone to their heads and confused them to the point of making them think that they are entitled to do as they please without consequence. The first principle of the United Nations, the one upon which our Organization is based, is the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members. The second principle is that all Members — all Members — shall fulfil in good faith the obligations assumed by them in accordance with the present Charter. In other words, any attempt by a Member State

to put itself above the Charter is a serious offence against the membership and constitutes a threat to peace. Guaranteeing respect for those principles can no longer be postponed.

As difficult as that may be, solving the problem of the Security Council is a challenge we have to take up. I am well aware that by saying this I am stirring up a hornets' nest, but even hornets can be managed successfully if due precautions are taken. I propose that, at the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, we seriously consider what those precautions should be.

We hope that today, after all that has happened in the world since the United Nations was founded, our most powerful sister nations will be willing to give peace and democracy a chance. In any event, it should be borne in mind that privileges granted by law on the assumption that they are reasonable and for the common good remain valid only as long as that assumption holds true.

I think we all agree that merely increasing the number of members or of countries with the privileges of permanent membership or the power of veto in the Security Council would in no way address the core issue. While it is necessary to ensure fairer and more geographically balanced representation, increasing the number of Security Council members would do nothing to correct the anomalies that we should be trying to rectify.

In addition to the themes of hunger, poverty and high oil and food prices and the high-level dialogue on the democratization of the United Nations, to be held in three sessions as I have just explained, at the sixty-third session the General Assembly will devote special attention to the following major themes which, for the sake of brevity, I shall now simply outline. I invite all members, however, to review the full text of my presentation, which is now available in all the working languages of the Organization. Each theme is closely related to the lack of democracy at the United Nations and is considered to be of the utmost urgency.

Today, there is scientific consensus on the human origins of climate change, especially following last year's publication of the fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The report concludes and asserts that global warming is unequivocal and that tangible solutions are needed to address it. The adoption of the Bali Action Plan constitutes an important step in that direction.

It is imperative that the value of tropical forests as important carbon sinks be recognized and that the countries historically responsible for climate change pay fair incentives for their conservation. We must not forget that deforestation, which causes 20 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, is largely a consequence of the extreme poverty of small farmers in developing countries.

Water is not a commodity to be bought and sold. It is a fundamental right that must be recognized as one of the goals of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life". The World Bank reports that, by 2025, two thirds of the world's population will not have enough clean water. We need to join forces and resources to take immediate steps to protect the sources of that precious resource, improve measures to prevent water pollution and alert peoples to the impending crisis, which threatens the lives and well-being of hundreds of millions, if not billions, of human beings.

With respect to terrorism and human rights, no State should appropriate the right to decide on its own which States are terrorists or sponsors of terrorism and which are not. Less still should States that are guilty of wars of aggression — the worst form of terrorism imaginable — presume to arrogate that right to themselves and take any unilateral action they may deem appropriate.

For that reason, we insist that it is time for the General Assembly to embark, with all due seriousness, on a discussion of international terrorism, including its definition and the assignment of responsibilities for dealing with it. That is a task, my dear sisters and brothers, that cannot wait.

General and complete disarmament is one of the fundamental objectives of the United Nations. Yet, that urgent issue has been pushed into the background and has not received the kind of follow-up it deserves. The mere presence of 4,600 nuclear warheads on high alert poses intolerable risks to international security, since accidental launches can always occur. Each year this body adopts over 50 resolutions and decisions on those issues. Yet, something is missing from our deliberations — the effective implementation of our decisions by constructive action.

This presidency will call upon all Member States at the sixty-third session to adopt a results-based approach both to disarmament and to the regulation of conventional armaments. Progress in that important area, as in all others, must be measured by deeds and not only by words or numbers of resolutions.

Human trafficking, the situation of Palestine, humanitarian assistance and gender equality are other issues to which we will give special and priority attention. Similarly, in considering the various aforementioned themes, we should devote special attention to the most vulnerable, including most especially children in situations of armed conflict or humanitarian disaster. Our efforts in that area must not be limited to the provision of shelter, clothing and food, but rather focus special attention on their right to education.

In conclusion, today more than ever before, candour is indispensable in international relations. I would like this sixty-third session of the General Assembly to go down in history as the "Assembly of candour" for the sake of world peace and the eradication of poverty and hunger from the Earth. Considering the seriousness of the global crises, diffident and ambiguous language will get us nowhere. The United Nations can effectively tackle the deep-rooted and urgent problems of the day only by doing so clearly, firmly and unequivocally. Sugar-coating, speaking euphemistically or engaging in petty semantics so as not to call things by their name, all on the basis of an erroneous concept of diplomacy, has never worked and will never work. The world crisis is too serious to allow for euphemisms or half measures.

Change — real, credible change — is the watchword of the day. Even more than political will, we will need to summon great spiritual strength to carry out the changes needed to democratize the United Nations. That, in turn, will strengthen the Organization's capacity to contribute with growing effectiveness to the supreme cause of peace in our world. However, knowing that we are in need of great spiritual strength must not discourage us — it is within our reach.

All persons and nations without exception possess enormous reserves of human nobility. It is time for us to tap into the reserves of moral strength within each of us as individuals and within all of us as nations. If we do so, our hearts and our capacity to love and serve will grow and we will find ourselves better able to bring our great human family to new levels of solidarity that guarantee to all of us, and to generations to come, a future of enduring peace.

Let us put to rest forever the unhealthy aspiration of dominance of one over the other. Let us free ourselves, too, from our addiction to war and violence in general. Imperial dreams and behaviour are incompatible with the principles to which we have all committed ourselves within the Charter and with the ideal of a world at peace in international security. Let us work together now to make a truly United Nations — united, fraternal and joined in solidarity. Now is the time for all of us to begin the process of turning weapons into ploughshares to feed a world languishing in hunger and poverty.

Let Gandhi be for us not only someone to whom we render tribute in speeches and declarations but, more importantly, a paradigm that we try to emulate. Let us honour his global legacy by putting the greater good of our shared humanity at the forefront of our collective endeavour to build a world community at peace with itself and in harmony with Mother Earth, our vast shared home.

Let us give genuine democracy and peace a chance. Let us conduct ourselves as the people we are — all sisters and brothers, reconciled with one another and committed to living in non-violence and solidarity. A democratized United Nations will be the indispensable tool for achieving those lofty goals.

I should like to end as we began. On this occasion, I invite representatives to hear a song. I believe it is an appropriate way to end my opening statement.

The members of the General Assembly heard a musical performance.

Item 125 of the provisional agenda

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/63/350)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Next, I would like, in keeping with established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/63/350. It contains a letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly, in which he informs the Assembly that seven Member States are in arrears in the payment of

their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I would like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years".

May I therefore take it that the General Assembly takes note of the information contained in document A/63/350?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the sixty-third session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly, at the beginning of each session, shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

Accordingly, it is proposed that for the sixty-third session the Credentials Committee should consist of the following Member States: Botswana, China, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Mexico, Mozambique, the Russian Federation, Saint Kitts and Nevis and the United States of America.

May I take it that the States I have mentioned are hereby appointed members of the Credentials Committee?

It was so decided.

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

Letters dated 8 and 15 September 2008 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/63/352 and A/63/352/Add.1)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Members are aware that, pursuant to section 1, paragraph 7, of resolution 40/243, no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly should be permitted to meet at United Nations Headquarters during the main part of a regular session of the Assembly, unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

On the strict understanding that meetings would have to be accommodated within available facilities and services, authorization is thus sought for the following subsidiary organs: the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the Disarmament Commission, the Independent Audit Advisory Committee, the Executive Board of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund and the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and of the United Nations Population Fund.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to authorize those subsidiary organs of the Assembly to meet during the main part of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.